

BOOK REVIEWS

Psychoacoustics of Music and Speech, by B. C. Deva; Music Academy, Madras, 1967; Rs. 15

The book under review is remarkable in many ways:

First, though its emphasis is on psychoacoustics, it makes many pregnant remarks on our music from the point of view of aesthetics as well. Its chief viewpoint is indeed that of a scientifically trained thinker, but the treatment is such that the specificity of approach is not really allowed to blur the truth that, in the crucible of an open and dynamic mind, thinking about music is necessarily a union of various strands, — of physics, psychology, aesthetics and even metaphysics. I do not mean merely that the book contains chapters on such diverse topics as 'the tonal structure of *Tambura*', 'melodic perception', '*raga* and *rasa*', but that care has been taken to indicate, at many a place in the book, how the various viewpoints are naturally implicit — and closely related — in living enquiry.

Then again the book is replete with attempts to think seriously. This enables the author, on the one hand, to make some useful and necessary distinctions — generally ignored by those who confine themselves to a mere translation of the ancient texts, or regard citation of *slokas* as the main work of a musicologist — and, on the other, to point out the (realized) limits of his present thinking, which is both honest and suggestive. Some of these distinctions, requisite for any one who seeks to understand Indian music, are: acoustics as physical, physio-

logical and psychological (p. 3); form principles as conscious or unconscious (116-17, 108); the remote and immediate backgrounds of a tone or musical phrase (17); and the two aspects of *chalan* which outlines the *rupa* of a *raga*, — discreetness and continuity (161-62). There is, of course, nothing profound about such thinking. But, the distinctions in question are all quite basic; and the average student of music, even in our universities, does not make them. The careful reader should also be struck by the suggestiveness of such remarks as:

- a "The movements of tones with their suggestions of tensions and relaxations create (an) almost infinite number of moods .. no beginning has been made in this direction in our musicology." (141)
- b "Durational values .. affect our perception of tonal qualities." (289)

Note that the first utterance, to me incontrovertible, hints at the ability of the creative singer to work up affects and imagery relative to any part of the day within the framework of any *raga*, — an obvious challenge, and a reasonable one, to the popular understanding of the time-theory of the *ragas*; and that the second could lead to a substantial revision of the concepts relating to the euphonic aspect of our music, say, *svara* and *raga*, which are at present interpreted in utter isolation from the temporal aspect — a fact which partly explains why our musicians often revel in high-lighting *svara* and *laya* alternatively. The book also puts forth some significant concepts. Of these, the one which fascinates me is: 'tonal archetypes'. (135)

Third, the author is not only quite familiar with, and responsive to what is of value in our musical 'traditions', but refuses to bow, with reason, to all that they say.

Lastly, the book reveals a keen mind that is both patient and mobile. Carefully prepared bibliographies and reports of scientific investigations are two main features of this book. At the same time, the author is by no means hesitant to hazard bold generalizations.

And here he could often with fairness be challenged. Thus, the statement:

"Since musical production is an emotional state, it is necessarily a state of tension" (138)

is too categorical to be acceptable, and too indiscriminating to be clearly intelligible. Does 'musical production' here mean (a) the act of producing music or (b) the music produced? If the former, how is singing throughout emotional or a state of tension? And is it not more properly describable as creative activity rather than as a state of tension on the whole? If the latter (b), is every heard song emotional and tensive in its impact on the singer or the listener?

Another instance of the defect in question is provided by the following on p. 281:

"Structure, in essence, is **existence** in relationship. It is an ordering of 'elements'. **All** branches of knowledge study **such** ordering of elements." (Emphases mine)

Now, this is just not true. The emphasis of a good deal of present-day philosophy is certainly not on understanding how **existents** are inter-related. And it is clearly too much to say that 'the pluck is always a noise' (132) unless we preface 'a' with 'also'.

As for the style of writing, it is disfigured by defects of various kinds, many of which could perhaps be avoided by careful proof-reading. The more glaring of these are:

'the scientific thought of vedic texts **have** profundities' (Preface, vii); the omission of 'the' not only in constructions of the kind: 'the sooner . . . the better' (as in line 1, p. 194; line 1, last para; p. 131; and in third para, lines 1-3, p. 163) but in such phrases as: 'the scientific attitude or viewpoint', (p. 1, last para; p. 2, line 3); and a very inadequate use of diacritical marks (p. 2).

Nor are the details of argument everywhere well brought out. The formulation of the law of closure (179) fails to mention the 'coercive' or well-designed quality of the figure, which is here crucial. The conclusion that 'noise is an important and, as far as rhythm is con-

cerned, an essential acoustic material in music' (132) is neither well argued nor in itself congruent with the best ideals of rhythmic practice.

But these defects of the book are clearly outweighed by its positive merits. Solid and scholarly, it is throughout provocative. Every serious student of music and speech should find it of value.

S. K. Saxena

Melodic Types of Hindustan, by Narendra Kumar Bose; Jaico Publishing House, 1960; Rs 25

The book under review studies in great detail the development and metamorphosis of musical scales of India.

The first part attempts at elucidating the scientific principles underlying the modern *raga* systems of Hindustan. As a first step in this direction, the author has redefined the nomenclature of notes. As he very rightly emphasises, the word *suddha* is misleading, as there is nothing particularly 'pure' about any given scale. He himself uses the words 'Scale of Origin' (p. 22). Even this is misleading, as it would be almost impossible to take any scale as the 'origin' of any other. The present reviewer would prefer the words 'standard' or 'reference' in this context. Bose, in this book, takes his 'scale of origin' as that of *Raga Kedara*. By attaching the vowel endings (*o a i* etc.) he gives a nomenclature for other variants. Incidentally, Bose commits a very obvious error of calling Bharata's *Natyashastra* as *Bharatiya Natya Shastra* (p. 2).

In the succeeding chapters theories of consonance-dissonance relationships and structure of scales are given relying much on Helmholtz's work. This has however to be revised in the light of recent research, as modern studies have much more to say on this subject than Helmholtz's earlier investigations.

The chapter on microtones is interesting. The author discusses here cyclic units like *srutis*. He points out the inadequacy of 22 *srutis* and suggests the adoption of 53 units (*anusrutis*). This idea is very well worth examining. Bose discusses in detail also the bi-centric nature of scales, primary scales (*mukhya gramas*) conversion of primary scales, secondary, transilient and chromatic scales. Mode (*murcchana*), tonality, modality, tonic and so on are studied in the later chapters.

Part 2 deals with music in ancient and medieval India. Starting with pre-*jati* music the discussion proceeds to *melas*. One of the most significant changes in Indian music was the 'disappearance' of *gramas* and *murcchanas* and change over to *melas*. This is sometimes ascribed to Central Asian influence. Some scholars feel that this 12-tone scale may have had a Dravidian origin. It is quite possible this change took place due to the influence of finger board instruments and the psycho-physiological necessities of melodic music.

Part 3 concerns itself with modern *ragas*. There is a detailed description of what a *raga* is and, the development of this concept from *Naradiya Siksha* and *Natyashastra* onwards. Bose discusses the seven characters of *ragas*: *grama*, *murcchana*, *amsa*, *varjita swara*, *nyasa*, *apanyasa* and *bisishtha tana*. The author then proceeds to analyse a number of *ragas* on the basis of his classification of scales.

In Appendix B, is given the details of construction of a fretted instrument which can give 53 intervals. The distances between consecutive frets are also given. The instrument will have to be actually constructed to verify its accuracy and usefulness.

The book is doubtless the product of a very diligent study and deserves careful reading.

Bhatkhande Smriti Grantha (Bhatkhande Commemoration Volume) Hindi. Ed. P. N. Chinchore; Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, Khairagarh, 1966; Rs 25

The Vishwavidyalaya is to be congratulated on bringing out this important and interesting publication on the life and work of Bhatkhande.

To understand the role that Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (10-8-1860 — 19-9-1936) played in the history of Hindustani music, it is necessary to go back a couple of centuries. The case of Karnatak music was different from that of Hindustani music — definite directions were given by Purandara Dasa to the practice of music and to the theoretical side by Venkatamakhin; one observes a cogency and link between theory and practice. Socially also South India has generally accepted music as a 'respectable' profession and accomplishment. North India, on the other hand, had for the past two centuries or so looked down on music as a way of living not to be accepted as 'decent'. While artists of very high calibre and genius lived and were honoured, their lives were rarely related to other creative sections of society. Some of the best musicians were Muslims who neither mixed with other sections of society, nor did these sections welcome any efforts to establish such contacts. Most musicians were extremely limited in their outlook and their lives were such that they were not easily accepted as 'respectable' people. Being illiterate, they were prone to disregard the intellectual aspects of music. Thus there was a cultural chasm between theory and practice.

It was in such a society that Bhatkhande lived. Being intellectually alert, he realized the necessity for a proper codification of North Indian music. He strove to link the practice and theory of Hindustani music and if today we have some order in this music, it is due to him and the great musician, Vishnu Digambar Paluskar. Bhatkhande's books in Marathi and English were the results of this missionary zeal of his. He established training schools (Madhav Sangeet Vidyalaya, Gwalior and Marris College of Music, Lucknow) with regular syllabii and examinations. He was responsible for convening some of the most significant musical conferences.

The present book is a collection of essays by him and on him. There are seven sections: a lengthy biography of Bhatkhande by Dr. S. N. Ratanjankar, his foremost pupil, a long essay by P. N. Chincore,

a chapter on Bhatkhande as an educationist, his letters and notes on the Madhav Sangeet Vidyalaya, a collection of rare compositions gathered by him (sources are given) and his own compositions (he used the signature, '*Chatur*') various essays on him and a miscellanea.

The most important part of the book are the papers and letters of Bhatkhande. They reveal his great urge to revive the forgotten theoretical knowledge, his keen observation of musical finesse, his catholic mind (he had toured South India in search of musical knowledge) and above all his humility — a rare virtue.

There are some serious limitations of the book:

The material gathered here relate mostly to Bhatkhande's activities in and around Gwalior. More information of his early work in Bombay and later on in Lucknow would have been of value. This seems to have been realised by the editor himself.

More of his memoirs, particularly on the material on which he developed his system of notation and classification of *ragas* would have been of immense importance.

The articles by the contributors are all only eulogistic. To be fair to Bhatkhande, it is necessary to re-evaluate his work and theories. Also — and this seems to me to be very important — there should be appraisal of the consequences of his life and work on our music.

No doubt he was responsible for the revival of unprecedented interest in music and musicology. He was a gigantic personality whose work it is difficult to believe was done by one man. He brought into Hindustani music a much needed order. But there should have been essays critically examining his theories. Also, one cannot say that his efforts have always left creative legacies. His attempts to make music accepted in society, his making music a text book affair have driven music to the market place as a commodity — a part of the 'democratic' way of life. Institutional teaching, which he and Paluskar initiated, has produced mediocrity; and this mediocrity is being furthered by more and more examinations and 'schools' of music.

It would have been better, therefore, if the book had contained impartially critical articles on his theories and system of education. Bhatkhande himself might have advised such an approach to music.

B. C. Deva

Rangadarshan, by Nemichandra Jain; Akshar Prakashan, Delhi; Rs. 20

Nemichandra Jain's book on Theatre in India fills a very real need in Hindi, where perceptive and thought-provoking books on the subject are rare. This is all the more so, since the book is not cast in a conventional mould but is a searching probe by a literary man closely connected with the theatre movement in this country for the last two decades. He strives for an objective understanding of the meandering stream of theatre in this country but his personal involvement is evident in the almost agonised heart-searching brought to bear on the problems and the unfulfilled aspirations of movements seemingly full of promise. It has made him go deep to the very roots of theatrical activity itself, its *raison d'être* in the living present, to account for its apparent inability to be a vital compelling force. Understandably, though Sri Jain's frame of reference is the entire Indian scene, his focus of attention is the Hindi-speaking and Hindi-understanding world, where it can safely be said, a sensitive theatre hardly exists.

Theatre is a social activity which in its best periods has acted as a mirror of the inner psyche of a community from which at the same time it derives sustenance in strange ways. It thus becomes imperative that a profound sense of inadequacy should lead to an inner confrontation with those very elements, historical or otherwise, which impede, hinder or help this flowering and fulfilment. That it requires courage and honesty to an extraordinary degree to do this is clear, and Sri Jain faces the problem squarely. One may not agree here and there, with the details of his assessment; one's persisting sense of faith and optimism may reject an insidious sense of gloom as the historical reality, stripped

grimly, presents itself in all its contradictions; but one cannot but admit that without this facing there shall be no leap into creative activity and there shall be no vital theatre movement in this country.

The design of Sri Jain's book flows from this angle. The first three chapters concern themselves with the nature of drama as a social activity, its inner necessity, and its physical organisation. With copious illustrations from the immediate historical past in this country and elsewhere the groundwork is laid for the real debate where East and West confront each other in drama. The whole of the East has been deeply involved in this dilemma and the contradictions stemming from it — India perhaps most of all. After all, being heir to a highly developed and sophisticated aesthetics, which despite a historical break of a thousand years in organised dramatic activity refuses to die and has percolated down to the innumerable folk-forms, is not anything any dramatic artist in this country can honestly ignore. Imitation of impulses from the West — howsoever seminal in the country of their origin — is really no solution. The direction, too, is not easy to find. Spiritual and psychological digestion can be an infinitely painful and prolonged process.

It is towards the search for this direction that the book is oriented, examining in its course the state of the various folk-forms, some new experiments, the attempts at organisation of various kinds of theatre and theatrical activity, training and teaching as well theatrical criticism and the problems of translation. The all pervading questions of State aid, commercialism, and reaching out to larger number of people are examined. What makes this book different is the authentic, experience-based ring of it all.

Many theatre-lovers will agree entirely with Sri Jain that the time has come to stop thinking of drama as a mere branch of literature. It has its own language, visual, aural as well as oral (speech); its own rhythms, its own frame of reference. It is also true that responsible, sensitive writing for the theatre is not seriously taken by writers (at least in the Hindi world). There are various causes for this but the biggest is the lack of comprehension on the part of literary people of the real nature of this activity. The playwrights' contentment with

superficial (often sentimental) values of judgement is noticeable as there is by and large a lack of realisation that drama is the product of a profound poetic realisation of the predicament of Man. This by no means implies that drama must be in verse. Sri Jain is right. A language of the theatre has to be striven for and extended wherein this insight can be embodied. Mere reportage will not do. (A little re-reading of the *Natyashastra* without ritualistic shiboleth will clean up many vistas. Ritual itself shall become illuminated with dramatic vision). But everything said and done and for all the book's excellence and the fact that this reviewer agrees with much that Sri Jain says, one cannot shake off that nagging feeling of gloom pervading book. There is too much of yesterday in this book, with all its controversies, seminars and conferences. There are times when the pace of history accelerates, when directions change dramatically. Yesterday's hot controversy suddenly ceases to be a live issue. (Picking out one example, the evaluation of the so-called opera form in the north is a part of yesterday's debate. The examples given reflect yesterday's partisan controversy. I personally disagree now with what I agreed to yesterday). The present is such a time — a time for bold breaking away. Tagore himself has told us that going away is not coming back. A ruthless clearing up of mental junk is the requirement of the times. Sri Jain's book should be a good tool in the hands of those in the Hindi world who wish to clean up their minds for themselves — either by agreeing or disagreeing. It should be in the hands of all those who are concerned about the state of the Theatre.

A word for the illustrations. Excellent as they are, they do not do justice to the range of the book, nor are they placed in such a fashion as to illustrate a point. Sri Jain is perhaps not to blame. Photographic documentation has never been a strong point with us — particularly in the field of drama.

Snehlata Sanyal